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United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations

Culture of peace

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 7 October 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In the 1995 Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (A/51/889-S/1997/357, annex) the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) agreed that Jewish holy sites in the areas under the administration of the Palestinian Authority would be duly respected and protected.

Agreed arrangements regarding the ancient Jewish holy site known as Joseph's Tomb, located in the West Bank town of Nablus, included the continued presence of Israelis at the site, and the preservation of existing religious practices.

During the course of the violence, incitement and rioting in the West Bank over the course of the past week, the Jewish holy site of Joseph's Tomb became a target of gunfire and violent attacks, both by mobs of Palestinian civilians, as well as armed militia and members of the Palestinian police, in stark and blatant violation of all agreements with Israel. This even led to the death of an Israeli police officer on duty within the site, after Palestinian officials refused to allow his safe evacuation when he had been severely wounded by Palestinian gunfire.

With a view to reducing tension, an agreement was reached on 6 October 2000, between the Israeli Defense Forces and the Palestinian police, whereby the Israeli personnel on duty in the Tomb would be removed from the site, as a temporary measure, and the Palestinian Authority would ensure its continued protection and preservation.

With the removal of the Israeli personnel, in accordance with this agreement, frenzied Palestinians, together with members of the Palestinian police, entered the site, set it ablaze, sacked it, violated it and commenced dismantling the historic and sacred structure of the Tomb.

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The Government and people of Israel, and Jews throughout the world, are outraged at this insufferable act of sacrilege directed against the most fundamental sources and tenets of the Jewish religion, and of civilized society. Israel holds the Palestinian leadership fully responsible for this sacrilege in the light of its unending incitement and encouragement of mob violence in the area.

Israel calls upon the civilized international community to condemn this action, with the utmost gravity, and exert its influence on the Palestinian leadership in order to prevent continued violation of this sacred site, and to enable its immediate repair, reconstruction and rededication. Israel further appeals to religious and political leaders throughout the world to demand that the Palestinian leadership ensure respect for other religions and for fundamental norms of civilized behaviour.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda items 32, 33 and 40, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Yehuda **Lancry**
Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations